

## CHAPTER III

### WOMEN AND HINDUISM

Hinduism is an ancient religion of human civilization. It is mostly followed in the Indian subcontinent by more than one billion people. Countries like India, Nepal, and Mauritius have large number of Hindu people. *Hindu*<sup>1</sup> is a Persian term which is generally used for the people who lived near Sindhu river, now situated in Pakistan. Hinduism is also known as Sanatan dharma or Brahminism. The genesis of Hinduism is before circa 300 BCE<sup>2</sup>. There are some rituals which have origin in Neolithic times (c. 4000 B.C.E.). The main feature of Hinduism is that it is not created from the sermons of the prophet. It followed the principle of evolution. Hinduism, dissimilar to different religions, does not stubbornly affirm that the last liberation is conceivable just through its methods and not through some other. It is just a means to an end and all methods which will at last prompt the end are similarly endorsed. Hinduism enables the supreme opportunity to the normal personality of man. Hinduism never requests any undue limitation upon the flexibility of human reason, the opportunity of thought, feeling and will of man. It permits the vastest flexibility in issues of confidence and love. Hinduism is a religion of opportunity. It enables outright flexibility to the human reason and heart with respect to inquiries, for example, nature of God, soul, creation, type of love and the objective of life. Hinduism does not lie in the acknowledgment of a specific principle, nor in the recognition of some specific customs or type of love. It doesn't compel anyone to acknowledge specific authoritative opinions or types of love. It permits everyone to reflect, explore, enquire and meditate. Consequently, a wide range of religious beliefs, different types of love or Sadhana, and assorted sorts of ceremonies and traditions have discovered their decent

places next to each other inside Hinduism and are refined and created in agreeable relationship with each other. Hinduism does not censure the individuals who deny God as the maker and leader of the world, who try not to acknowledge the presence of an endless soul and the province of Mokshas or condition of freedom. Hinduism does not render the upholders of such perspectives unfit to be perceived as devout and good individuals from the Hindu religious society. The religious friendliness of Hinduism is world renowned. Hinduism is to a great degree catholic and liberal. This is the major component of Hinduism. Hinduism pays regards to all religions. It does not criticize some other religion. It acknowledges and respects truth—wherever it might originate from and whatever clothing it might put on. There are extensive quantities of the adherents of different religions in India. But then, the Hindus live in idealize agreement, peace, and kinship with every one of them. Their resistance and individual feeling towards the adherents of different religions is wonderful. In spite of the considerable number of contrasts of mystical conventions, methods of religious teach and types of ceremonial practices and social propensities predominant in the Hindu society, there is a basic consistency in the origination of religion and in the point of view and the world, among all segments of Hindus.

Women in Hindu religion are considered as Shakti i.e. source of all energy but if we meticulously analyzed then we found that there is no single viewpoint on women. It has changed from time to time .sometimes it gives equal status to women and sometimes not. But here doubt occurred in researcher mind regarding the contradiction found in philosophy and religious practices of Hinduism.

In this chapter the researcher has enquired the primary texts and other important texts of the Hinduism to know the gender blindness which existed in Hindu society, has its genesis in Hindu core texts or it was developed in later phase due to ritual practices.

### **3.1. Women in Vedic literature**

Before entering into the women position in the Vedas, the researcher wants to give a brief idea about the origin of Vedas. Vedic writings don't originate from a solitary social setting, and their synthesis is probably going to have proceeded for right around a thousand years, a period amid which Indo-Aryan talking individuals in northern and focal India were changed from transient, semi-itinerant pastoralists, to individuals from an agrarian culture with huge urbanization. Without a doubt, the most punctual layer of the Vedas is the songs of the Rg Veda Samhitā, whose structure is probably going to have been amid the mid-to late-second thousand years previously the Common Era. Albeit some of the time the division separates, with writings straying past the hypothetical bounds of their compose, it is vital to comprehend the conventional division of Vedic literary material into Samhitās, Āranyakas, Brāhmanas, Upanisads and Sūtras. Just the initial four are generally thought about śruti (disclosure) the sūtras viewed as smṛiti Samhitās, in spite of the fact that there are significant contrasts between the RgVeda Samhitā and the Samhitās of the other three Vedas. Āranyakas are works hypothetically expounding on the significance and energy of ceremonies, and the best possible arrangements for them. The word aranya some of the time signifies 'woods' however here just speaks to the wild past the settlement, the fitting area for finding out about a portion of the more dangerous Vedic ceremonies, since the writings tend to focus on the mahāvṛata (talked about beneath) and the pravargya (Witzel 2005), two customs viewed

irresolutely as capable yet unsafe. Āranyakas once in a while draw in much remark in initial works and courses, yet they are vital archives of custom data. Brāhmanas likewise remarks on customs, elucidating their motivation and power, and some give fanciful stories clarifying the roots of ceremonies. The writing parts of the Yajur Veda Samhitā are Brāhmana-like in this sense, despite the fact that they are not titled in that capacity. The separation in time from the beginnings of Vedic ceremonies and mantras can make the Brahmins questionable advisers for the first importance of them. They all things considered give knowledge into the understandings of custom present in their time. The failure to comprehend past ceremonies, while scarcely remarkable to Vedic India, focuses to the long stretch over which Vedic religious culture created. The Upanishads are celebrated as a portion of the most seasoned recorded philosophical creations. For sure, one of the perils of concentrate the Upanishads is accurately their expulsion by both emic and etic mediators from their Vedic setting. They are unequivocally structures expounding on the cosmology inside which custom happens, and they can't be completely seen autonomously of the Vedic custom world view. Later Indic reporters, most broadly Śamkara, co-selected certain Upanisadic entries to help a theory of outright monism, while Western grant has frequently centered around the magical and reflective measurements of the Upanishads to the detriment of their associations with custom. The Sūtra writing, while hypothetically at a noteworthy expels from other Vedic pieces by the attribution of smirti status is in reality near other late Vedic arrangements as far as dialect and substance. Sūtra creators gave bearings to the execution of the customs whose reason, control and cosmological noteworthiness alternate classes of content dealt with. The Sūtras are isolated into Śrauta Sūtras (those covering 'grave' rituals), Grha Sūtras

(those covering the residential rituals) and Dharma Sūtras (those covering fairly more extensive themes of law and direct). While the Sūtras are among the most current Vedic arrangements, and the most seasoned syntheses are Samhitās, there isn't a flawless fleeting movement between the diverse classifications of content. The accompanying passages are intended to group late dating gauges, together with the thinking behind them, for the classifications of Vedic writings.

In Hinduism Vedic period is considered as more developed are from the perspective of Women and its position. In the Rig Veda period women enjoyed more freedom and respect in society. There are twenty seven Women seer in Rig Veda known as 'Brahmavadin'. Characters like Aditi, Juhu, Urvashi are considered as semi-goddess or divine characters while some of them like Shraddha, Medha are the personification of abstract ideas. But there are nine who are generally considered as human. They are Vishwavara, Apala, Ghosha, Godha, Lopamudra, etc. Rig Veda considered that there are close relations exist between Women and the divine nature.

“Profound thought was the pillow of her couch,  
Vision was the ungruent for her eyes.  
Her wealth was the earth and Heaven,  
When Surya (the sun-like resplendent bride) went to meet her husband.”<sup>3</sup>  
“Her mind was the bridal chariot,  
And sky was the canopy of that chariot  
Orbs of light were the two steers that pulled the chariot,

When Surya proceeded to her husband's home"<sup>4</sup>

Vach, daughter of the sage Ambhrina, uttered the hymns known as Devisukta mentioned in the tenth mandala of Rig Veda (10.125). This was composed for the autumnal prayer to get energy through the ultimate devotion. She showed feminine force as the source of creation

"I am the queen, the bestower of riches,

I was the first to know among the holy ones;

Me, the gods put in many places,

Making me enter and dwell abundantly"<sup>5</sup>

Viswavara was another famous scholar of that period who composed the hymn for the fire.

"The fully kindled Fire, bright against the firmament,

Facing the dawn, shines far and wide;

Viswavara proceeds towards the east with obeisance

Praising the gods, with oblation and ladle full of butter."<sup>6</sup>

It shows that the hymn was composed by Viswavara with a free and independent literary temperance. Another important woman in the Vedic period is Apala whom (8.91) hymn of Rig Veda was assigned. There is a conversation between Indra and Apala which showed the in depth knowledge of Apala. Ghosha is also a prominent woman scholar.

She had the maximum contribution to the Rig Veda. The two hymns which she composed were (39-40). Each of the hymns carried fourteen verses. In these verses she argued in front of Aswani, the importance of women in household life. Apart from these scholars there are also other women seers who did not compose whole hymn but few stanzas were written by them. Mandhatri wrote few lines in the praise of Indra in sixth verses of 134 hymns. Lopamudra, Shashwati and Romasha are also composed not for man but for different human virtues. Lopamudra wrote two stanzas in the hymn (1.179.1-2) which dedicated to the 'Love'. Women are not only mentioned in ritualistic Vedas but also in the Philosophic Upanishad. Maitreyi wife of Yajnavalkya is an eminent scholar who scholarly debated with husband regarding many metaphysical issues. Another important scholar who encountered with the sage Yajnavalkya is Gargi, daughter of the sage Vachaknu. Rig Veda also carries some hymn which is related to our day-to-day life where women play an important role. First of all marriage is considered as sacred work in Hinduism. In Rig Veda, marriage is meant for performing sacrifice and procreation. In Aitereya Brahmana, it is mentioned that unmarried women have no right. There is no evidence of child marriage exist in Vedas. The rig veda mentioned bride should be fully matured during the time of marriage. Basically, in Vedas, there are three types of marriage has seen i.e. kshatra/Rakshasa, Svayamvara and Prajapatya etc. Generally, monogamy was practiced during the period of the Vedas but the ruling class and elite people can marry more than one woman. Aitereya Brahman accepted that a man can have more than one wife. Women should monopolized her love for the common husband, mentioned in the Atharva Veda. There are also cases of Polyandry was seen in the Vedas. Widow remarriage also happened during the Vedic time, mentioned in the Atharva

Vedas. Niyog was also conducted to avoid remarriage. In it was mentioned that women during their monthly period considered as untouchables. Women also took part in agriculture and hunting in this period. Women have also religious rights such as writing mantras, vedic samskaras and sacrifice. She had also a special upanayan through which she can participated in fire ceremonies and kula pujas. In the Vedas, there is a concept called Stri Dhan which showed the partial property right of women. In general women during that period have been seen with high respect and statute even if those who adopted the prostitution profession regarded as 'Sadharini' or the commoner. They learnt to dance, music, and literature and got the glory and respect in the society. There are also negative remark exist in the Vedas. It was mentioned, "Let a female child be born somewhere else; here, let a male child be born."<sup>7</sup> Above all, we can say the position of women in the Vedic period is better than at any other time where women enjoyed maximum freedom.

### **3.2. Women in the Hindu Epics**

Hindu religion has a treasure house of knowledge which is manifested in various forms. Among them the epics are most popular one . Epics in the Indian subcontinent was written in the poetry form. In Sanskrit, it was called 'Kavya'. In Hindu religion there are two famous kavya i.e. The Ramayana and The Mahabharata,. Initially, these were written by Saint Valmiki and Saint Vasyadev but later it had written in many languages viz. Sarala Das's Vilanka Ramayan, Mahabharata, Kritibas Ramayana in These two are under the categories of *itihas* .There is a belief that The Ramayana which etymologically means 'Rama's Journey' was taken place in Treta Yuga. It consists of 24000 verses in Seven Kandas or chapters viz Bala Kanda , Sundar Kanda etc . Like that The



Mahabharata was occurred in the Dwapar Yuga, historically believed that it was happened 3500 BCE. This Maha Kavya was composed with more than 100000 verses or couplets, seven times bigger than 'Iliad'. It has 18 parvas or sections which described after the core verses i.e. Bharat which consists of 24000 etc. The two major part of the Mahabharata is The Gita and The Haribhamsam. There is a saying that whatever is not in Bharata i.e. The Mahabharata, that is also not exist in The Bharatbarsva i.e. India. It means these epic are the reflection of the Indian Society. It is required to study the position of women in it.

There are two types of women character has been found in the tales of Ramayana. The first one is saintly one who renounced every worldly pleasure and pondered over the God only. Ahalya, Sabari came among the above category. The second types of women stayed in the society in general and family in particular and did all household works and tried to faithfully executed the duties i.e. Samsara Dharma. Mandodari, Kaikeyi, Kousalya etc. are the examples of this kind.

In The Ramayana most important ascetic character is Anusaya. Anusaya was the wife of saint Atri. Austerity and Compassion was two important character of her. Once Atri said her that people were suffered from drought from decade then Anusaya created fruits and roots and gave them the water of Ganges in her asylum<sup>8</sup>. It shows the kindness of a mother heart. Once She gave a lecture on wifely virtue to Sita. She told that righteousness and obligation is the utmost important quality of a good wife<sup>9</sup>. Anasuya is the pious character of the story who renounced all the mundane activities for the betterment of society and also to lead a better spiritual where she can devote her entire life for her beloved God.

Another Important Character was Shabri. Shabri was low caste women. Her ultimate devotion to her spiritual guide makes her great. She was the disciple of the disciple of great sage Matanga. These saints once said her that Lord Ram is surely come to your hut and by seeing her you got the best of abodes i.e. 'Vaikuntha'. After that, she led a life of austerity till the lord Ram's reaching. When she saw him, she cannot control her emotion . She offered him berries which were already beaten by her. The intention behind this act was to test the berries and produce best one to her lord. Outwardly it was not a gentleman act but in its deeper sense, it is highest point purity which one disciple can show in her devotion to her lord. It was the unique character of Shabri which made her great devotee. Her life showed that illumination can not attained by the so-called traditional rituals and intelligence rather than sincere effort, perseverance, purity and patience are the real thing through which any man from any strata can reach that highest position of devotion.

Ahalya was another important character of the epic The Ramayana. The word *Hala* in Sanskrit means ugliness. There was nothing called ugliness inside her . Lord Brahma gave her name and gave her to the great sage Gautama and later he married her. Though she was pure and pious but there is little bit of perversion exist her due to her physical beauty which gave Indra a chance to seduce her in the disguise of her husband<sup>10</sup>. Gautama in anger gave curse both Indra and Ahalya. He said to Ahalya, "You are gifted with beauty and youth, but your mind is fickle. You shall not continue as the single beautiful damsel in the world."<sup>11</sup> He also said, "You shall live here unseen, feeding on air without food and tormented by repentance."<sup>12</sup> But Gautama repented for his anger and assured her that Lord Rama will come in future and free her from curse. It shows the highest degree of patience in her.

Lanka was the land of Ravana the great king of demons. Though Ravana had bad qualities in him but there are several good qualities in him. Both Rama and Hanuman admired the greatness of the Rakasha King .Hanuman exclaimed ‘Ah’ when he saw marvelous personality of Ravana.He commented on Ravana, “If he were not highly impious, he could very well have become the protector of the celestials!” His wife is Mandodari is also a pious lady whom Hanuman wrongfully understood as Devi Sita. Her ultimate devotion to her husband was really commendable. Though Ravana was attracted towards Sita and kidnapped her and tortured her. Still then Mandodari was not jealous towards Sita. But when Ravana was killed she with anger mourned near his dead body, “There are in your inner apartments ladies far more beautiful than Sita, but you did not perceive them, being blinded by lust. Sita is not my equal or superior, either in birth, beauty or accomplishments, but this too you did not perceive.Death does not visit men without any cause, and Sita is the cause of your death.”<sup>13</sup> But still, then she was proud of her husband, father, son, family, and clan which showed the qualities of self-respect in her and devotion to her husband.

Apart from Mandodari, there are other women who led family on the one hand and on the other hand performed their duty with highest responsibilities. Kaikeyi was negatively portrayed in the story of Ramayana but her dedication and boldness is more than another character. King Dasaratha had taken her to the battle fields where he was severely injured. Kaikeyi showed the dedication to cure him. She cleaned her wounds in her mouth and recover Dasarath from the injury. But she has two weaknesses. First is the excessive love towards her son Bharat which instigated her to dethrone Rama in his ceremonial function by forcing Dasarath to keep his promise. The second one was the

fear of retaliation towards the elder king Koushlya. But Kaikeyi's obligation towards her husband has unquestionable.

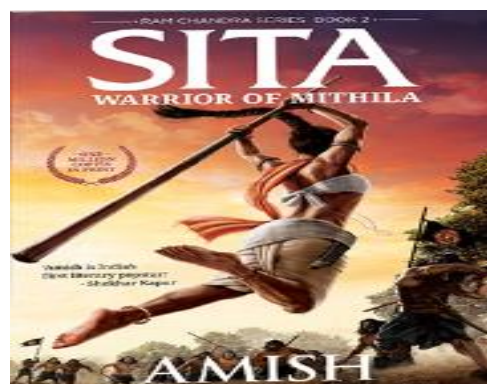
Kausalya, the mother of Lord Ram was a pious law. She has a kind heart as well as the stable mind. Though sometimes she thought that to go with Ram in the jungle but there were other factors which pulled her to stay back in Ayodhya. She never uttered a single word against Kaikeyi and Dasarath for the injustice happened to Ram .She had calm mind and clear understanding about the problems of human life. Someone questioned Kausalya about 'sorrow'. She answered, 'destroys patience, sorrow destroys knowledge of the scriptures, sorrow destroys everything there is no enemy like sorrow' It shows how she was philosophically enlightened.

Sumitra is the mother of Lakshmana and Satrugna. She always tried to maintain harmony among the family-members. She always advised her sons to consider Rama as a father, Sita as Mother.She permitted her son Lakshmana to go to the forest with Ram. It showed personal interest is less important than collective interest which is great example of sacrifice.

The last and major important character of Ramayana is Sita, wife of Lord Rama. Sita followed each step of Rama never questioned on his decision. Sita strongly believed that Ram surely saves her from the clutches of Rakhyasas. Sita lived an austere life still then people criticized her character and Ram due to Loka dharma or Raja dharma told Sita to give Agni Parikhya. This decision was shocked for Sita but she appeared this difficult exam and proved her purity. But still then Ram sent her wife to the ashram in the jungle

during pregnancy for the societal interest . If we analyzed the character of Sita we found that there was a deep ocean of devotion, love, kindness in her heart.

The method to portray the above characters of Ramayana also comes under criticism. The major criticism in The Ramayana is the behavior of Lord Ram towards Devi Sita. In his book, *Sitayana: Sita's Fire*, K. Srinivas Iyengar criticized that Sita warned Rama that he will be blamed in all ages for his rejection of his obedient and religious wife. He mentioned that The Ramayana will be remembered as, 'will in all future time set the pattern of vulgar, selfish. Proudful, one-sided, pitiless description of supportless Women mankind'<sup>14</sup>.Sita and Suparnakha are the sufferers of abuse and patriarchal discrimination which occurred due to a race between the two power blocs in order to prove their masculinity and dominance. Valmiki's Ramayana is pictured as a popular king not a beloved husband. He maintained 'Raj dharma' in the cost of 'Pati dharma'. Apart from that in the text of Ramayana, the writer wanted to idealize the suffering and developed an unquestionable moral standard which directed women to lead their life in that way. This also empowered the man to maintain their male dominance which later provides a scope to criticize Sanatana or Hindu dharma.



(An Assertive Fictional Representation of Goddess Sita in Amish's Novel Source- Wikipedia)

The Mahabharata is another great epic who depicted the struggle for power, identity self-respect and above all it was happened to establish a just world. There three major women character in the whole epic around whom whole narration was revolved around. They are Gandhari, Kunti, and Draupadi. Gandhari was highly moral ethical person who maintained her sanctity during the supreme crisis of her life. She scarified her petty interest, personal happiness, material benefits for other. She was the daughter of Gandhara king Subala .Bhisma uncle and guardian of kuru prince Dhritarastra who was a blind guy, wanted a pious dutiful girl for him. He sent message for Gandhari. When Gandhari knew that her husband was blind, she also took vow not to open her eyes and live a life like a real blind person. She wrapped a bandage in her eyes. It showed her devotion towards her husband. Gandhari always maintained an impartial stand in each and every issues which Kuru dynasty was encountered. The only person of Kaurav family whose heart was broken and filled with sorrow was Gandhari when Pancali has molested in the full assembly of Hastinapur in front of great warriors and protector of dharma i.e. the ultimate morality. She appealed in front of the King Dhritarastra not to support ill-conduct of their son Duryadhona. She also threatened the King to destroy her beloved son who was against the betterment of Kuru dynasty. It showed that Gandhari was in favour of the ultimate moral order i.e. Rta and free from all kind of personal biasness. She gave blessings not for the victory of her son Duryodhan but for the perseverance of that highest order of morality.

Kunti another magnificent character of The Mahabharata who showed her sacrifice, patience in every incident. Kunti renounced her sexual pleasure due to the life of her

husband. After death of her husband, she took care of her three son viz. Yudhistir, Bhima, Arjun along with her two step sons viz. Nakula and Sahadeva during the days of suffering. She criticized Pandavs especially the elder one Yudhistir for his silence during the molestation of Draupadi. She told to Yudhistir that his all dharma was fruitless at that juncture when he was maintained silence during the injustice to Draupadi. It showed Kunti was always tried to take the side of Dharma.

The central nucleus of the whole story was Draupadi, the most attractive and fascinating character. A girl born out of the sacred fire with a divine purpose which designed by the great power to establish a just world. She was the conglomeration of many qualities pride, prejudice, courage, love compassion, dedication, sacrifice, patience. She successfully overcame all the hurdles of her life. Though she married to the five sons of Queen Kunti but still then she performed her duties like an ideal mistress. She not only cares her near and dear ones but also the common people who are the subject of her husband king Yudhistir. One example of her life shows her greatness. When Indraprasta was established near the bank of Yamuna, Duryadhon was invited to the innagural ceremony. He was astonished to see the glory of that city as well as the dedication of Draupadi who successfully supervised that function, feeding highest to lowest.<sup>15</sup> Draupadi wishfully accepted all the pain during the Van vash and Agyant vash. Draupadi was a woman of self –respect. She resisted with her full force during her molestation in the assembly. She criticized Yudhistir who did not perform his ‘Pati Dharma’. She also criticized the guardians of Kuru dynasty like Bhisma, Drona, Dhritarastra, Bidur, Kripacharya etc. She had strong determination which compelled her to take vow to destruct Kuru dynasty. This touched the pinnacle of the empowerment of Women. At

last after the war Draupadi performed all her duties from both the side which showed her greatness.



( Draupadi in The Mahabharata Battle Field In A popular TV Serial,Source- [www.pinkvilla.com](http://www.pinkvilla.com))

Characters like Bhishma did not raise his voice against the injustice of Kauravs due to his bounded morality. Later he accepted the women are the backbone of man's life. He also suggested not stopping women for roaming. But in The Mahabharata, Women are considered as a material object. King Virat mentioned it in his dialogue between Yudhisthira during dice game.

*'Striyo gavo hiranayam ca yac canyad vasu kimcana'*<sup>16</sup>

It means women, cattle, gold whatever other valuables. But women did not have any freedom on ancestral property. Therefore they were known as '*Adhana*'<sup>17</sup>. Women were always being confined in the rooms otherwise they are considered as impure.

*'kauthahalamala sadhvi viprivasamalah striyah'*<sup>18</sup>



Bhisma the celibate and guardian of kuru kula in his death bed advised the king Yudhistira,

“agnir iha pramada dipto mayas ca mayaja vibho  
Ksuradhara visam sarpo mrtyur ity ekatah striyah”<sup>19</sup>

The above couplet depicts that women is more dangerous than poison, snake and razor. It showed what was the real position of women which was backed by royal force. So the researcher in some places in the epic found the high status of women and some other places women is oppressed by the evil social forces.

### **3.3. Women in Smritis, Shastras and Puranas**

Apart from The Vedas there are many other things which enriched Hinduism. Many intellectuals had interpreted Vedantic religion in different ways in different times. They wrote Hindu philosophy by using many literary styles. Among them Smriti, Shastra and Purana are important. Smritis etymologically means ‘remembered’. It was written during the later Vedic period.<sup>20</sup> Dharma Shastras like Artha Shastras and Manu Smritis provided initial laws to Hindu society. Manu Smritis mentioned women as sacred and divine,

“Yatra naryantu pujoyante ramante tatra devatah”

“Yatratatu na pujoyante sarvastatra phalah kriya”

(Manu-Smiriti 3.56)

The above couplet depicts, 'where women are worshipped, there the gods are delighted; but where they are not worshipped, all religious ceremony become futile'.<sup>21</sup>Manu also discussed about the honour of elderly women. He told that maternal aunt, paternal aunt and mother-in-law should be respected like the wife of a teacher (2.131). He also mentioned that sister should be respected like mother (2.133). In the 2.211, he obstructed the student not to assist his guru's wife in bathing, massaging, arranging her hair etc. He also said female relation should be honoured otherwise that family will suffer with curse and perish (3.58). Women always be honoured by husband, brother, brother-in laws and father also due to the welfare of self (3.55).Religious rites of a person is solely depended upon one's wife alone.(9.28) .But there is paradox lays in Manu Smirti.Many Scholars considered it as the source of injustice and discrimination not for women but for the lower castes. There are many quotes which criticized Women and curtailed their freedom. Women are protected by her father, husband, and son respectively (9.3) and women should confine in the house under trustworthy and obedient servants (9.12). It showed Manu provides women limited freedom and neglected his existence itself. Manu criticized that there are six qualities which destroy women i.e. drinking liquor, association with criminal, separation with husband, rambling around, sleeping at an unreasonable hour and dwelling other man's house (9.13). But a critic said that why restrictions only put on women, not the men. Though Manu considered women as sacrosanct he did not give the equal position to them.

Puranas and Shastras are more inclusive than the Vedic literature because the later one is exclusively meant for the twice-born and sudras are not considered as twice-born. So they

have no right to listen the Vedas. So in the case of women. But there is no opposition in the cases of Puranas. Everybody can listen to Puranas. There is no prevention or privileges for certain specified countries. So it is more inclusive. There are certain women characters in Puranas which shows the position of women. Madalasa is one of the important women characters in Puranas. She represented the typical ideal Hindu women's life who has in-depth knowledge of self with faithful obligatory attitude. According to '*Markandeya Purana*'(Ch. 20-44), Madalasa was a charming young and virtuous lady who was the daughter of Vishvasu, the king of Gandharvas and married the prince Ritadhwaaja. With the passage of time, once a conversation happened between Aswatara and Madalasa where she got the real knowledge and understood that her physical existence is only the manifestation of Maya. Though she continued her family life but she was already in the path of inner joy. Later it was seen her outer behavior and people considered her as an 'Atmadarsi'. Devahuti was another woman of puranic period who had extensive spiritual knowledge, mentioned in the Bhagavata Purana. She was the mother of great sage Kapila and daughter of Manu. Devahuti was a devoted wife who won her ascetic husband Kardama's heart and experienced celestial bliss. She encouraged her son Kapila to find solution to the problems of sense which always revolves around 'I' and 'Mine'. It was the inspiration for which Kapila wrote Samkhya Yoga. Sati was another women character who mentioned in many puranas and upa-puranas. Lord Shiva is the husband of Sati. Uma also another woman character associated with Lord Shiva. In Kalidas's '*Kumarasambhava*' and '*Matsya Purana*', there is mention of Uma, the daughter of The Himalaya. Sharmishtha, Suniti and Shabiya are also minor characters, mentioned in different puranas.

The Presence of Women in different Shastras which are not exclusively religious but it has its own importance. Kalidas, a famous Sanskrit scholar who characterized Indumati as a good manager of house (grihini), a trusted friend (Mitah-shakti), the supportive counsel (sachiva) and at last an esteemed student of fine arts. In Vatsyayana's Kamasutra women is considered as sahakami for the healthy enjoyment of life. In ArthaShastra though women was respected in some section but in other section she was economically exploited for a narrow political interest. In the Dharmashastra women was considered as subordination to men. There are some popular women characters in Shastras. Maheswata is among one of them. Banabhatta drew the lively character Maheswata on the romantic sheet 'Kadambari'. This character initially felt into love then saw tragedy and at last became an ascetic. After that her devotion to her lover and determination shows the purity as an important virtue of women of that period. Shakuntala also another character who showed her love with king, his denial and her sufferings, pleasure as an ascetic. This was beautifully portrayed by Kalidas where the story speaks about the human romance but compels listener to submerge with divine love. Vasavadatta also played central role in Vasha's plays. She is the queen of Udayana. Her compassion showed when she weaved the garland for Padmavati and accepted as co-wife. Vasantasena is another character, presented in Bhasa's '*Daridra Charudatta*' had great literary appreciation. Apart from these Radha, Damayanti, Chudal are also influential character who positioned in highest place in different plays.

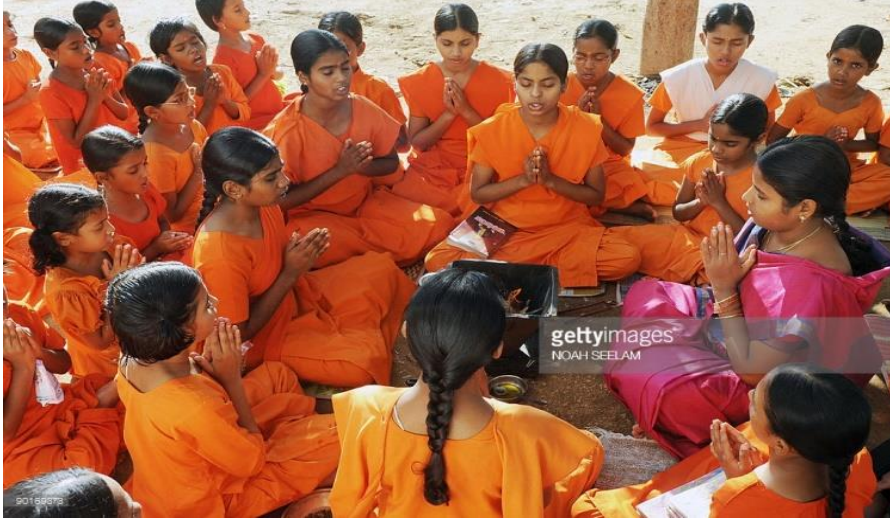
### **3.4. Women in Cultural Practices**

Women in Indian society, is considered as sustainer and giver. The notions of divinities are embedded with women. Therefore our all cultural tradition are women and family-centric. The Puja is the one of the important function of traditional upper caste Hindu families. It is a daily ritual accompanied with sandhya vandana. There is a popular belief system the divine order of a home is maintained by women which naturally brings happiness, wealth and peace into that family. To perform Puja it should be important to maintain the cleanliness. This duty is also performed by women. Women of the home is the sole decision maker regarding the internal function of the house. But it is a paradox where the money or wealth involve decision-making, the women became subordinate which shows the half-way women empowerment. Initially a woman in the home is considered Griha Lakshmi who brings wealth to the home but naturally compelled to live inside the four walls. There are many temples where women cannot be entered due to ill belief system. women also have important role in cooking . They believed cooking as sacrosanct like other ritualistic activities. Women perform their cooking activity with both physical and mental purity. Dana is another concept which normally performed by the household especially by women. There are a number of stories which shows how women's life is affected by Dana. The famous one is the story of King of Harishchandra and also the Story of Nala Damayanti. If we analysed the festivals of Hinduism then we found that most of it is directly celebrated by the household couple where women presence is a necessity but in the same festivals women like widow or barren are treated as inauspicious. It shows that women do not get total freedom. There are also evil practices like Sati, Child marriage which developed in later Vedic period and continued

for long time. Another important factor which has influenced the cultural habits of Hindu women is lays in history. The external invasion is the major cause which shaped the behavior and life style of women in India particularly the western region. According to Prof Kapil Kumar, the conservativeness regarding women exists in Haryana and Punjab region due to the continuous attack of Mughal and other foreign enemies. This War zone affected women and children severely. At last we can say that it is not culture which solely responsible for the women position and cannot not be studied exclusively rather than a complete minute analysis is needed to get the real understandings over women issues. Here are two pictures which depicts Women in Hindu ascetic culture.



(A photo of Hindu Women Sanyasin, Source-Dandapani Photography)



(Women are performing Hawan, Source- [www.gettyimages.com](http://www.gettyimages.com))

<sup>1</sup> In Persian language S is pronounced as H

<sup>2</sup> JONES, C. A. A. J. D. R. (1961). *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF Hinduism*. (J. Gordon Melton, Ed.). New York: Facts on File. pg Xvii

<sup>3</sup> Rig Veda, 10.85.7

<sup>4</sup> Rig Veda, 10.85.10

<sup>5</sup> De. SK, Great Women in Vedic Literature, *Great women of India*, Majumdar. RC, Madhabananda, Swami (2012), West Bengal, Advaita Ashram pub. pp- 131

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp-133

<sup>7</sup> Atharva Veda, (6.2.3)

<sup>8</sup> Narayan swami. R, Kuppuswami. Sastri, Sastri. S Krishna (1933), *Valmiki Ramayana*, Madras, Madras Law Journal Press edition (2.117.17-8)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid (2.117.21-6)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid (1.48.19)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid (7.30.39)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid (1.48.29-30)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid (6.114.27-30)

<sup>14</sup> Hazarika. M, Gender (2014) roles and representation of feminine identity in Ramayana : A Critical Study, *International Journal of English, Language, Literature And Humanities*, 2(5), pp-297

<sup>15</sup> Narayan swami. R, Kuppuswami. Sastri, Sastri. S Krishna (1933), *Valmiki Ramayana*, Madras, Madras Law Journal Press edition (2.52.48)

<sup>16</sup> McGrath. Kevin (2011), *Stri: Feminine Power in the Mahabharata*, Delhi, Orient Blackswan, pp- 10 (iv.63.32)

<sup>17</sup> Adhana means those who lived without property (1.77.21), child and slave are also come under the categories of adhana.

<sup>18</sup> McGrath. Kevin (2011), *Stri: Feminine Power in the Mahabharata*, Delhi, Orient Black Swan pp. -14 (v.39.64)

<sup>19</sup> McGrath. Kevin (2011), *Stri: Feminine Power in the Mahabharata*, Delhi, Orient Black Swan pp. - 206 (xiii.40.4)

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<sup>20</sup> Raman, Sita Anantha(2009), *Women in India: A Social and cultural history*,Vol-1,California,ABC CLIO publication pp-43

<sup>21</sup> Chaudhuri Roma,Women's Education in Ancient India ,Majumdar RC(2012) , *Great Women of India*, West Bengal Advaita Ashram pp-88